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ABSTRACT

Using structured observation, researchers carried out a field study of the work behavior of five elementary school principals in two northeastern states. Each principal was observed for one work week. The results were compared with similar observations of secondary principals. The observers recorded the nature, location, time, duration, participants, and materials used for each separate activity. They also analyzed the purpose, form, sender or receiver, amount of attention received, and action taken for all written correspondence. The study results showed the principals worked an average of 49.7 hours per week on 611.6 activities. Classification of the activities into 13 types revealed the most frequent were unscheduled and scheduled meetings, desk work, and telephone calls. The elementary principals' correspondence indicated they received more letters from superiors and parents than did secondary principals. Analysis of the purpose of principals' activities showed that most actions were aimed at organizational maintenance, school curricular and instructional programs, and pupil control; the least time was spent on extracurricular activities. Overall the research indicated that elementary and secondary principals' activities resemble each other in their fast pace, variety, brevity, fragmentation, and verbal emphasis. (RW)

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THE MANAGERIAL BEHAVIOR OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

by

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and

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EA 014 466

Paper presented at The Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York City, March 1982.

Field studies of school organizations and their administration have a long if thin history in educational administration beginning with Boyan's observations of a junior high school reported in 1951.[1] Since then there have been a number of administration-oriented field studies including Iannaccone's observations of an elementary school, Willower and Jones' study of a junior high school, and Wolcott's extensive ethnography that featured "Ed Bell" the principal of an elementary school.[2]

A recent line of observational inquiry that specifically examines administrator work behavior has been spurred by the development of Mintzberg's method of structured observation.[3] This method provides a detailed record of administrator work activites over time. It lacks the broad contextual focus of ethnographic studies, but it does tell us what administrators actually do and how they allocate their time and attention.

There have been a number of Mintzberg-type studies of educational administrators. Mintzberg included one school superintendent in his sample of administrators of various kinds of organizations, and studies of school superintendents have since been completed by Duignan, by Pitner and Ogawa and by Larson, Bussom and Vickers.[4] Secondary school principals have been studied by O'Dempsey, by Martin and Willower, and by Willis, and Sproull conducted an investigation of managers of educational innovations.[5]

The research reported here used the structured observation method to examine the work behavior of elementary school principals. Of course, there have been many inquiries on elementary school principals'

work activities that did not use Mintzberg's method. Examples are diary studies which have a long history, the in-basket research which differed from the others because it examined the behavior of elementary principals in simulated rather than real situations, and more recently, Peterson's observation of two urban principals' work and Crowson and Porter-Gehrie's field study of the discretionary behavior of big city principals, including some heading elementary schools.[6]

Since the present study employed the structured observation method it not only continues lines of research on managerial behavior in general and on the elementary school principalship in particular, but enables comparisons to be made between its data and those gathered on the secondary school principalship using the same method. The purposes of the study were to observe and record the work behavior of a sample of elementary principals and to compare their work behavior with that of secondary principals.

The Sample

Five elementary school principals from different kinds of school districts and communities in two northeastern states were selected for observation. Each principal was interviewed in January 1981 to explain the study, gather background information and build rapport. Later each principal was observed for one full work week. One was observed during January, two during February and two during March of 1981.[7]

The following is a brief profile of each principal and setting. A single fictitious name was given to each principal.

Boreas was in his 50s and was principal of a 600 pupil school located in a sparsely populated rural area. Notus, a black male in his late 40s, headed an academically-oriented center-city school with 400 students. The city, which had experienced large out-migrations of white families to the suburbs and economic decline, was about 75 per cent black. Eurus was principal of a 680 pupil open-space school located in a suburban area. In-migration had turned what was once a white suburban area into a mixed community of Hispanics, blacks and whites. At 38, Eurus was the youngest of the five principals, and with 16 years in education including four years in his present position, he was the least experienced. Zephyr, 49, was principal of an elementary school having over 1,000 students. The school was situated in a city of nearly 60,000 which was once a center of the hard coal mining industry but now depended on a diverse economy. Eos, who was 50, served as principal of two schools, each having about 250 students. One of her schools was located in an older section of a middle-size city while the other was situated in an adjoining suburban-rural township. Eos spent mornings in one school and afternoons in the other, using a fluctuating pattern that varied the times and days of the week she was in each building.

The Observations and Records

Each of the principals was observed during the entire work week except for a few instances when "confidential" matters were dealt with. All of the principals' activities were recorded in the form of written field notes. The notes contained a description of the activity, its location, time and duration, participants and any materials used. At

the end of each day a brief session was held with the principal to discuss any unclear events and to learn in a general way about any "confidential" meetings.

The field notes were systematized into the four basic records characteristic of structured observation: the chronological record, the correspondence record, the contact record and the analysis of purpose. In addition, each principal kept an after hours' work log which provided descriptions of such activities and their duration.

To facilitate comparisons, the minor modifications of Mintzberg's method made by Martin and Willower were incorporated in this study. They included the additions of a "personal time" category, and of a category labeled exchanges which were very brief encounters, and the recording of interactions with secretarial personnel, none of which were used by Mintzberg.

Findings

The Chronological Record

The five principals worked an average of 41.7 hours on the job and an additional eight evening hours per week. This 49.7 hour load was lower than the 53.2 hours reported by Martin and Willower for their sample of high school principals. Additional comparative data for secondary school principals given below were taken from that study which paralleled this one in terms of number of principals and duration of observations. Table 1 gives the basic chronological data for the principals observed in the present study.

Table 1

The Chronological Record

Activity	Number of Activities	Total Time*	Percentage of Time Mean	Range: 5 Principals
Desk Work	267	2611	18.6	9.0-29.8
Phone Calls	424	1117	8.0	3.8-12.5
Scheduled Meetings	42	1453	10.3	6.1-17.8
Unscheduled Meetings	1027	4565	32.5	22.3-38.8
Exchanges	842	842	6.0	3.6-8.6
Monitoring	92	613	4.4	0.8-8.3
Tours	146	583	4.2	2.8-5.7
Trips	37	754	5.4	0-12.2
Observing	9	357	2.5	0-6.5
Personal	67	501	3.6	0.9-5.7
Announcing	49	101	0.7	0.1-2.3
Teaching	7	271	1.9	0-7.5
Support Chores	49	264	1.9	0.1-4.4

* All times given in minutes

Table 1 goes about here

The elementary principals engaged in a total of 3,058 activities, averaging 611.6 each per week and 122.3 each per day. The mean number of daily activities for the principals ranged from Boreas' low of 87.6 to Notus' high of 148. The secondary principals averaged 149.2 activities per day, about 27 more than their elementary school counterparts.

Breaking down the elementary school principals' activities by type, they spent an average of 522.2 minutes per week or 18.6 percent of their time on desk work. This activity involved writing notes, completing reports, processing correspondence and similar chores. The range was from Eurus' low of 232 minutes per week to Boreas' high of 837. The high school principals spent a comparable 16 percent of their time doing desk work.

Telephone calls included internal calls made via intercom systems as well as the usual external calls. The elementary principals gave 8 percent of their time to this activity compared with 5.8 percent for the secondary principals. Again, the range for the elementary principals was substantial with Eos, who was highest, spending more than three times as many minutes on the telephone per week than Boreas, who was lowest.

Scheduled meetings were planned in advance. The principals averaged 8.4 scheduled meetings per week each. These meetings tended to be long, averaging 34.6 minutes, and consuming 10.3 percent of the principals' time. Boreas has the most scheduled meetings with 19 while Zephyr had the fewest with three. Boreas' figure was more than twice

that recorded by the next highest principal; it resulted from his preference for formal grade level meetings with teachers.

In contrast with the elementary principals, the secondary principals averaged 23.4 scheduled meetings per week which consumed 17.3 percent of their total time.

Unscheduled meetings were hastily arranged contacts between the principals and one or more persons which usually occurred spontaneously. The principals gave 32.5 percent of their time to this activity, more than to any other. They averaged more than 40 unscheduled meetings per day, although the meetings were short with a mean duration of 4.4 minutes. While there were differences in the number of unscheduled meetings held by the principals, the lowest figure was an average of just under 30 such meetings per day.

The secondary principals also spent more of their time (27.5 percent) in unscheduled meetings than in any other type of activity. They averaged 48.8 such meetings per day. Both the elementary and secondary principals had most of their unscheduled meetings with persons internal to the school, but elementary principals had almost four times as many meetings with parents and devoted nearly five times as many minutes to them.

Exchanges were brief verbal encounters with one other person lasting one minute or less. However, in this study as in that of the high school principals, time was measured in full minutes and all exchanges were logged as lasting one minute even though many were briefer. The elementary principals spent 6 percent of their time in exchanges compared with 9 percent spent by their secondary school counterparts.

All of the principals would routinely tour their buldings, walking throughout them and making brief stops for a variety of reasons. The principals averaged about six such tours daily, with Eos, the lowest, averaging four. The elementary principals spent 4.2 percent of their time touring compared with the secondary principals' 7.7 percent.

Monitoring differed from touring in that it was done in one area of the school usually for pupil control purposes. Monitoring typically occurred in the cafeteria during lunch, at the main entrance during arrival and again at dismissal time. The principals averaged 3.7 such activities per day, but the daily average ranged from Eos' low of one to Notus' high of 6.6. The elementary principals spent 4.4 percent of their time monitoring while the secondary principals spent 5.5 percent.

Trips away from their buildings took 5.4 percent of the principals' time compared with 2.2 percent for the secondary principals, but the figure was inflated because Notus took 15 such trips averaging 25 minutes each.

The elementary principals formally observed teachers during 2.5 percent of their total time, although two of them did not conduct any observations during the week of the study. This compares with 2.4 percent for the secondary principals.

Personal time was time spent alone or in conversation with the observer. The principals spent 3.6 percent of their time in this manner, compared with 5.1 percent for their secondary school counterparts.

The activities of announcing, teaching, and doing supportive chores usually handled by clerical or custodial personnel each took less than 2

percent of the elementary principals' total time. These activities also took only small amounts of the secondary principals' time.

In addition to these observed activities, the principals' after hours' work logs revealed that each spent a weekly mean of eight hours in job related tasks during evenings and weekends. The secondary principals spent 11 hours on such tasks, but they each gave an average of more than five hours per week to athletics while the elementary principals gave less than one.

The principals' activities were often interrupted. This resulted in polychronics, doing two things at once.[8] About 38 percent of all of the principals' activities were either interrupted or were themselves interruptions. This compares with 50 percent for the secondary principals. The activities of the elementary principals that were most likely to be interrupted were monitoring, scheduled meetings and desk work, in that order.

The work density of the principals' activities was analyzed as it had been in the study of secondary school principals. The findings were similar. The first one-third of the days' total activities were completed in smaller time frames than were either of the last two-thirds of the days' activities. Thus, the early portion of the day was busiest. This pattern held for all of the elementary principals. However, as was the case with the secondary principals, no pattern was found for the remaining two-thirds of the school day.

The Correspondence Record

All of the correspondence of the principals was examined and categorized as incoming or outgoing and analyzed as to its form, sender or receiver, purpose, attention received and action taken. A total of 916 pieces of correspondence was analyzed. The comparable figure for the secondary principals was 1,142.

A total of 575 pieces of the correspondence (63 percent) was incoming. Most of it consisted of forms, letters, notes, reports and memos. Teachers, followed by vendors, were the largest sender group. An average of 3.7 pieces of correspondence per day was received from superiors. The principals read and skimmed their correspondence about equally. Most of it, 62 percent, provided information and some requested approval or services (18.9 percent). The principals' response to incoming correspondence was usually immediate; only 17.4 percent was held for later reference or response. An interesting point is that Eos, with two schools, had substantially more incoming correspondence than the other principals. She was also highest in outgoing correspondence, but less substantially so.

The principals outgoing correspondence totaled 341 pieces. More than three-fourths of it was in the form of informal, hand-written notes, with forms, reports, memos and letters all contributing much smaller proportions. Almost two-thirds of the principals' outgoing correspondence was directed to themselves, usually as reminders or lists of things to be done. Teachers were next highest receivers followed by parents. The principals' outgoing correspondence with their

superiors averaged fewer than two pieces per week. Providing information and requesting services followed reminders as the major purposes of outgoing correspondence.

The correspondence record for the elementary principals was in the main quite similar to that of the secondary principals. The most notable differences were that the elementary principals had more incoming correspondence from superiors and parents and more outgoing correspondence to parents.

The Contact Record

Over 86 percent of the principals' activities occupying more than 70 percent of their time involved personal contacts. The contacts included face-to-face meetings, telephone calls and the often brief visual or verbal interactions that occurred during monitoring or touring.

The majority of the principals' meetings took place in their offices, but the hallways or other high density areas were the sites of the briefer interactions. More contacts were made with teachers and more time was devoted to contacts with them than with any other group.

Most of the telephone calls were brief. Almost all of them were made or taken in the principals' offices and more than 60 percent of them were initiated by the principals. The principals talked with their superiors just over twice a day on average.

Giving or receiving information were the activities that were most common to the contacts. However, as was the case with the secondary

principals, the complexity of the interactions as well as their formality was greatest in scheduled meetings. More time was devoted to planning during the scheduled meetings than to any other activity. In contrast, the secondary principals devoted much less time to planning during scheduled meetings.

The Analysis of Purpose

In the study of secondary school principals, Martin and Willower developed four major categories and a fifth residual category for the analysis of purpose. The major categories, organizational maintenance, school program, pupil control and extra-curricular activities were also used in the present research.

Organizational maintenance included work activities that promoted overall school operation. Examples were management action and routines of various kinds dealing with staff, pupil personnel services, school plant, public relations and health and safety. Maintenance activities took 38.6 percent of the principals' time and accounted for 53.7 percent of their activities. The figures for the secondary principals were close at 36.5 percent and 53.9 percent respectively.

School program had two subdivisions: instruction and curriculum. Instruction included activities such as teacher observations, contacts with faculty to review lesson plans or discuss teaching methods, and the principals' own teaching. Curriculum included activites such as planning, implementing or altering the schools' instructional programs. School program occupied 27.1 percent of the principals' time and 12.3 percent of their activities with nearly equal amounts of time going to

each of the subdivisions. The respective percentages for the secondary principals were 17.4 and 7.6. Hence, the elementary principals spent more time on instructional and curricular matters than their secondary counterparts. This finding holds when the elementary principals' teaching activities are eliminated since the percentage of time invested drops only to 24.6 and the percentage of activities to 12.

Pupil control included the principals' direct involvement with students who exhibited deviant behavior or with their teachers or parents. It also included monitoring and touring for purposes of maintaining discipline. Pupil control consumed 23.6 percent of the principals' time and 24.4 percent of their activities, with similar amounts of time going to direct involvement and to surveillance. The secondary principals gave 23.8 percent of their time to pupil control.

Extra-curricular activities were a minor part of the principals' work. They devoted only 3.7 percent of their time to them. In contrast, the secondary principals invested 14.7 percent of their time in extra-curricular activites.

The residual category of activities that failed to fit one of the four major areas of purpose accounted for 7 percent of the principals' time (7.4 percent for the secondary principals). The majority of these activities were personal in nature, often involving phone calls or errands.

Individual differences were found among the principals in terms of the percentages of their time that they devoted to each purpose area. The ranges give some idea of these differences. Eurus was highest on

organizational maintenance with a 44.2 percent commitment while Zephyr was lowest with 30.9 percent. Boreas devoted 45.8 percent of his time to school program while Notus gave a low of 21 percent. Notus' low stemmed from his failure to invest time in curriculum planning; he was second highest in instructional contacts with teachers. In the area of pupil control, Zephyr, with the largest school, was highest with 28.1 percent, and Boreas was lowest, with a 15.5 percent time expenditure. Eos, with two schools, gave more of her time (6.6 percent) to extra-curricular activities than any of the other principals, while Boreas had a zero time investment during the observation week. The secondary principals also exhibited individual differences in the percentage of time alloted to the purpose areas, but their ranges were smaller in the school program area and larger in the maintenance and extra-curricular areas.

In addition to the analysis of purpose of the principals' activities, their correspondence records were analyzed as to purpose. All of the correspondence fitted one of the four major categories of purpose. Organizational maintenance accounted for the bulk of the principals' correspondence including 76.2 percent of the incoming and 79.8 percent of the outgoing pieces. School program matters were 16.5 percent of the incoming and 12.6 percent of the outgoing items. Only 6.6 percent of the incoming correspondence and 6.7 percent of the outgoing dealt with pupil control. Only two of the principals had correspondence on extra-curricular activities. The virtual lack of

correspondence in this area contrasted with the secondary principals' 20.2 percent incoming and 9.6 percent outgoing rates. The other major difference between the elementary and secondary principals was the fact that 22.5 percent of the secondary principals' outgoing correspondence pertained to pupil control.

Discussion

Administrative Work

As far as its overall results are concerned, the present study confirms the picture of administrative work found by Mintzberg and by other investigators using the structured observation methodology. That picture includes a high volume of work completed at an unrelenting pace, variety, brevity and fragmentation of tasks, and preferences for verbal media and live action.

The principals engaged in an average of 14.7 activities per hour; they undertook a new activity every four minutes. Over 90 percent of the principals' work activities lasted 10 minutes or less. The mean duration of the principals' desk work sessions was under 10 minutes. It was less than two and one-half minutes for their telephone conversations and less than four and one-half minutes for their unscheduled meetings. Their tours lasted an average of four minutes and monitoring less than seven. Scheduled meetings were the only activity that the principals engaged in often that took appreciable lengths of time, averaging just under 35 minutes per session. Even the trips the principals took away from their buildings during the work day had a mean duration of only 20.4 minutes.

The frequency of interruptions was noted earlier. Here it should be stated that 43 percent of the scheduled meetings, just given as examples of longer activities, were interrupted, often more than once. In fact, once a scheduled meeting was interrupted, it was likely to be interrupted again. The interrupted meetings averaged 1.7 interruptions each.

The principals' worlds at work were basically verbal. They spent more than two-thirds of their time talking with people. They appeared to prefer the verbal medium, initiating more than 10 times as many verbal contacts as they did written ones. They also showed a preference for live action. Their face-to-face contacts exceeded the more formal telephone contacts by a ratio of nearly four to one. The principals were drawn to tasks that could be quickly handled, preferring not to let work pile up. Recall that more than four out of every five pieces of their incoming correspondence was dealt with immediately. Furthermore, the fact that unscheduled meetings was the category of activity that took more of their time than any other suggests that the principals' work days were not rigidly organized. They were able to give priority to "emergencies" or pressing matters that might arise unexpectedly, and to seek out the livelier aspects of their work. Their desk work sessions were short and they left their offices often to tour or monitor or deal with a particular problem.

What we called "domino eruptions" also illustrate the unpredictability of the principals' work. Domino eruptions were events that usually occurred early in the day and led directly to a series of

additional episodes. This phenomenon was observed for all of the principals each of whom devoted a substantial portion of a day to an unexpected occurence and its consequences.

Comparisons with Secondary Principals

Numerous figures have been given comparing the elementary principals of this study with the high school principals of Martin and Willower's. To summarize the main differences, the elementary principals engaged in fewer activities, had fewer interruptions and less correspondence. They also had fewer scheduled meetings, but spent more time on planning in such meetings. They had more contacts with superiors and with parents, and spent more time on the schools' instructional programs and less on extra-curricular activities.

Martin and Willower also characterized the high school principals as sharing positional commonality in the sense that they engaged in similar patterns of task performances, as exhibiting the "busy person" syndrome,[9] as having an inside focus, as taking a broad school-wide view of instruction but not becoming actively engaged, as having pupil control as a major interest, as non-beleaguered, as exhibiting a strong concern with extra-curricular activities, as maintaining "sectional control" by retaining command of their situations while deferring to the institutional authority of the superintendent and the technical expertise of the teachers, and as working in cyclic patterns.

These characterizations fit the elementary school principals of this study only up to a point. The elementary principals showed wide diversity in the allocation of their attention as the ranges given above

clearly showed. Our data indicated substantial individual differences among the principals which probably can be attributed to such things as administrative style, personal preference, and situational factors like school design and size, and environmental demands. Indeed, the principals often devoted large segments of time to pet activities. Notus, for instance, enjoyed working with the school's reproducing machine and personally did the work necessary to print his school's newsletter and those of two other schools in the district.

Only within this diversity were there positional commonalities. They stemmed from the similarities of the organizations the principals headed and from the continuous flow and pattern of administrator work already described.

While the elementary principals exhibited the same "busy person" syndrome as the secondary principals, the pace of the elementary principals' work was less hectic. They also had greater flexibility in the sense that they had fewer scheduled activities.

The elementary principals spent about 12 percent of their contact time with persons outside of the school organization. This suggests an inside focus, but it is reasonable that elementary (or secondary) principals would spend large amounts of their time working with persons inside the units they are responsible for managing. Furthermore, it is not clear just how much of an outside focus is enough. Given the fact that the schools in question were public schools, one would expect that the principals would be sensitive to and responsive to community concerns. It is probably safe to conclude that principals typically exhibit an outside focus that reflects the demands of their particular situations.

The question of how much is enough also applies to the principals' allocation of time to instruction and curriculum. The elementary school principals gave more time to these areas than did the high school principals, but what constitutes an optimum allocation is not clear. Such a question could, of course, be misleading since the quality of participation is as crucial here as elsewhere. Indeed, given teachers' desires for autonomy and aversion to close supervision, instructional supervision with a light touch might be effective as well as functional.[10] In any case, the tendency to gauge principals' effectiveness in school program matters in terms of the amount of time they spend in classrooms is simplistic. The quality of their work in instruction and curriculum is more likely to be reflected in their efforts to motivate faculty and in planning that facilitates good teaching.

While the principals spent more than one-fourth of their time directly engaged in school program, many of their other activities indirectly bore on instruction. Thus, they expended considerable time on pupil control, but some of those activities were efforts to solve discipline problems that interfered with effective teaching and learning.

Like their secondary school counterparts, the elementary principals were concerned about pupil control. However, their concerns were more informally expressed. The elementary principals had much less correspondence dealing with discipline and they rarely invoked more formal or more stringent measures such as suspension. Indeed, for the most part, they appeared to have amicable relations with the students.

Martin and Willower reported that the high school principals they studied were essentially non-beleaguered in spite of the frequent depiction of the principalship as a strife-ridden position. While all of the elementary principals faced the crises and conflicts that are endemic to administration, they were able to deal with them satisfactorily. The principals reported that they enjoyed their work and all took obvious pride in their schools. They were quick to point out their schools' special features and display examples of unusual achievements. Most appeared to be enthusiastic about being principals. None seemed "burned out." Like the secondary principals, the elementary school principals in this study could not be called beleaguered.

Sectional control was exhibited by the elementary principals in the sense that they ran their own buildings but deferred to superiors when necessary, and to teachers by giving them substantial classroom autonomy. The principals had a fair number of interactions with their superiors, spending 8.4 percent of their contact time with them. On an average day, each principal had more than two telephone calls, almost four items of correspondence, and more than one scheduled or unscheduled meeting with superiors.

The principals' focused their concerns on their own staffs and students rather than on district-wide problems. While they spent little time in classroom observation and allowed teachers wide discretion in instructional matters, the principals maintained overall command, knew what was going on in their buildings and by touring, monitoring and through numerous interactions in which information was received, kept watch over their domains.

The last two characterizations of secondary principals given by Martin and Willower were dealt with previously: the elementary principals did not share the secondary principals' concern with extra-curricular activities, but did exhibit the same cyclic work pattern.

All of the comparisons to secondary school principals have been made to those in the Martin and Willower study; the present research was a companion study to it using for the most part the same categories and procedures. Two other investigations of secondary school principals using Mintzberg's structured observation method were cited above. O'Dempsey's study of three principals in the Brisbane, Australia area apparently was the first Mintzberg-type study of educational administrators. He observed the principals for one week each; they had schools of similar enrollment in similar socio-economic settings. Willis observed the principals of a public school, a private school and a parochial school in the Melbourne, Australia area for a period of three weeks each. Each school served about 1,000 students.

Both of the studies reported the busy work pace, task variety, brevity and fragmentation, and verbal emphasis found in other investigations. However, comparisons with the present study often were not possible because categories, computation regimes, or reporting formats differed.

The following comments can be made. In general, O'Dempsey's principals were reasonably close to Martin and Willower's. However, Willis' principals exhibited a much more formal style engaging in fewer activities and spending more time alone and away from school and less in

face-to-face contacts than the principals in the other studies including the present one. In this connection, Willis stressed the invisibility to staff of much of the work of the principal.

A final comment on comparisons is to the studies of school superintendents cited earlier. The chief school administrators engaged in fewer and longer activities and held more meetings with organizational outsiders than did the elementary principals or the secondary principals, again with the exception of those in Willis' sample.

Concluding Comments

A portrait of how a small but diverse sample of elementary school principals allocated their attention has been presented, and comparisons have been made with a similar sample of high school principals.

However, the limitations of the structured observation method should be kept in mind. The small sample sizes that characterized all of the studies employing the method can easily lead to false generalizations. Differences between studies such as those on the secondary school principals give pause and underscore the importance of cumulative and comparative work.

Individual differences among subjects within studies also merit serious attention. Many such differences were discovered among the elementary principals in this study. Larson, Bussom and Vicars also found individual differences among the six school superintendents they observed.[11] As they pointed out, such differences indicate the utility of treating Mintzberg-type work characteristics as variables that can be examined against personal and environmental variables.

In addition, it would be desirable to employ structured observation in conjunction with other methods. Structured observation is essentially the quantification of work activities. It tells us little or nothing about context and meaning and it tends to ignore the crucial one time event that might be highly significant, in favor of repeated trivial ones.

The lack of information on the quality of administrator action leaves many questions unanswered. For instance, in the present study, it was not clear if the quarter-time commitment of the principals to instruction and curriculum was sufficient to the task. Nor was it clear if the relationships between the principals and their superiors were "loosely coupled."[12] The principals daily up-the-hierarchy contacts suggested that they kept in reasonably close touch with their superiors, regardless of who initiated the contacts. However, it was uncertain whether the contacts meant that the principals were getting directions from their superiors.

In spite of its limitations, structured observation has provided an interesting record of how a sample of elementary school principals spent their time. That record might have been altered somewhat with another sample or if compiled at another time of the school year. Still, its main findings concerning work volume and pace are consistent with studies of other administrative positions.

Finally, an important implication for the practitioner of administration should be noted. Events ordinarily controlled the principals rather than the other way around. In other words, the principals had not worked out means for deliberately allocating their

attention. They seemed to spend little time thinking about the activities in which they were engaged or attempting to anticipate and give meaning to future ones. This appears to be true of administrators generally. Thus, a key concern for the practitioner should be how to allocate attention to valued pursuits while handling the continuous action demands of administration.

Notes

1. N. J. Boyan "A Study of the Formal and Informal Organization of a School Faculty," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1951).

2. For Iannaccone's study see part four of D. E. Griffiths, D. L. Clark, D. R. Wynn and L. Iannaccone, Organizing Schools for Effective Education (Danville, IL: Interstate Printers and Publishers, 1962); on the Junior High School study see D. J. Willower and R. G. Jones, "Control in an Educational Organization," in Studying Teaching, ed. J. D. Raths and others (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967) and D. J. Willower, "The Teacher Subculture," in Interpreting Education: A Sociological Approach, ed. L. W. Drabick (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1971); H. F. Wolcott's study is The Man in the Principal's Office (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973).

3. H. Mintzberg, The Nature of Managerial Work (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

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